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AUTHOR Collier, Ken
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ABSTRACT

Because life styles, values, social institutions, and "survival activities" differ in undeveloped rural areas from those in industrial societies, the techniques and approaches used by rural social workers must be adjusted to meet the needs of the population being dealt with. In forager and agricultural societies, social workers and other human service personnel intervene into kinship patterns, extended families, customs, rules, taboos, and obligations that are quite different from those in cities. The theoretical paraphernalia that works in industrial societies does not apply in native villages or small prairie towns: therefore, an analytical, rather than a general cataloguing approach in intervening becomes more effective. Social workers who are trained in industrial and technological societies must discover the current stage of the agricultural structure of the rural family they are working with, the economic and cultural needs of the individual family, and the local helping resources available, in order to determine the most effective counselling approaches to use in a successful and humane manner, without destroying the ways of the native people in each rural society. (JD)

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# RURAL SOCIAL WORK - THEORY AND PRACTICE

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KEN COLLIER,
Special Lecturer,
Faculty of Social Work,
UNIVERSITY OF REGINA.

La Ronge Community Education Center,
LA RONGE, Sask.

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RURAL SOCIAL WORK THEORY AND PRACTICE

Anyone who has ever practiced Social Work in rural areas has become aware that there is a difference. The city is not the same as the country and the way Social Work is done in one is not the same as in the other. Several writers[1] have commented on this fact, and some Schools of Social Work[2] have lent some effort to examining the differences. The Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work[3] has conducted a workshop on the topic in Winnipeg, and now special interest groups, institutes[4] and classes[5] are springing up which deal with the topic. Other professions are aware of the special problems and issues that arise through practice in the rural areas.[6]

This paper is presented as an effort at providing some theoretical lenses through which to view the subject. Assembling large banks of data is, of course, the first job, and the list of people and institutions that are already compiling this data shows that, soon, there will be a considerable body of knowledge catalogued in the area. Having a theory, or a number of them, helps to sift the material, to categorize the content, to bring order and direction to it. That is what this paper is about.

In 1966, Social Workers from across the Northern part of British Columbia met to hear a speaker on the subject GOALS OF PUBLIC WELFARE IN A RURAL COMMUNITY[7]. The speech and the discussion rapidly turned to why things were different in rural communities, and at that time, there were no firm answers. In the meantime, however, sociology and anthropology and economics have made a lot of strides with theoretical and research material that is useful to this topic. The British Columbia Workers knew <u>that</u> things were different. Now we begin to know <u>why</u> things are different.

FORAGERS, AGRICULTURISTS AND INDUSTRIAL PEOPLES

When Social Workers help people in the cities, in the industrial centers, they deal, on the whole with people who are a part of the industrial culture, even if they happen to be casualites of it. The assumptions about life are largely shared, the means of making a living are known about, the reasons for customs, holidays, eating habits and such are understood by a broad cross-section of the population being dealt with. The industrial city is the culmination of hundreds of years of social change, and Social Work is one of the results of the rise of the industrial state. [8]

Social Workers and other human service personnel who go to work in rural areas come into contact with people who are not from the industrial center, who instead make their livings from agriculture or from hunting, fishing, trapping, timbering or some similar means. This fact has many implications for the practice of Social Work, beyond merely knowing about these ways of life. The way people survive is the way people become part of cultures that vary widely from place to place in rural areas and from city to country. Foragers, who hunt, fish, trap, gather roots and herbs, etc., have not only a different way of staying alive, but have social institutions and interpersonal relationships that are designed to help them stay alive. Their habits and customs, languages, food, interchange with other bands of people all have meaning in their survival activities, and together form the culture of the foraging peoples. Marshall Sahlins in his book STONEAGE ECONOMICS[9] outlines how people lived as foragers in North America and elsewhere. Sahlins and others like Claude Levi-Strauss[10] interpret this material and show how the foraging (or gathering) culture not only differed from agriculturists and city people, but also differed widely even from band to band, village to village.

Interpersonal relationships and contacts with outsiders was ruled by the

kinship system and taboos, totems, customs and "ways of the people" that varied from area to area, and could be related to the specific economic or survival facts of the region where the peoples lived. The nuclear family does not exist as we know it in foraging societies or in agricultural societies until a fairly advanced market stage of growing.[11]

Agriculture, in theory, follows after the foraging stage. The idea is that foragers eventually find out how to domesticate crops or animals, or both, and find this easier than scrounging a living off the land. Sahlins, Strauss and others all dispute this claim. Sometimes agriculturists went to foraging because that was easier. "The cheyennes left agriculture when the Spanish brought horses, and went to hunt the buffalo. The Paiutes ate the horses."[12] In any case, agricultural peoples tend to have their interpersonal relationships rules by an extended family system that includes a variety of people of various blood links. The agricultural phase of man's economic life was the stage when property and ownership became necessary, and the protections for these new social institutions evolved into the state, with its politics, national wars, and so on.[11]

In both foraging and agricultural societies, people helped each other to survive through obligations and voluntary associations which were kept together and enforced by the kinship and extended family systems. Self-sufficient bands of people made sure they would continue to survive through tight internal social organization and complex sharing and obligatory relationships with other bands of people. The mutual helping guaranteed that no person was abandoned or troubled alone, without aid, unless that person had committed some terrible deed against the ways of the people.

If we can assume, again in theory, that agriculture gave rise to industrial society (seeding caused a need for bigger implements, implements caused a need for metal, metal caused a need for mines and factories, etc.) then

there is another sharp breaking point, at which industrial work brought and end to the extended family, and defined the nuclear family as the economic unit of society. The extended family cannot be moved around to bring mobility to workers.

The Industrial Revolution swept away not only old forms of interpersonal relationships, but also the ways people could support and help each other. The feudal lord who had responsibility to protect as well as exploit his people was gone. The churches found the increasing charity burden beyond their means, if not their inclinations. Professional helping and support services grew as the old "barter system" of helping declined. The helping people - Social Workers, Psychiatrists, Church ministers and others - became more professionalized as they did their work as a profession - that is for pay. And the theoretical base, whether Freudian psychology (as in North America) or social administration (as in Britain and Scandinavia) was a product of the industrial society and culture. The individual mind, the nuclear family as economic unit of society, large institutionalized administrative bodies did not exist in foraging or agricultural societies.

Their workings and influences on Social Work and other human services are as msterious as any import from another culture. That is what we are exploring here - helping across cultural lines.

Let me explore for a moment one example of this cross-cultural exercise of Social Work - a classic example of cultural imperialism. In Telegraph Creek in Northwestern British Columbia a teacher in the school (an outsider working in an outside institution) diagnoses a behavior problem in one of the children as a family problem. The Social Worker is called in (by radio-telephone) to see what is wrong in the home. The Social Worker arrives by plane, visits the home, discovers no parents are there. They have been jailed for making home brew. The police do not think highly of the home

atmosphere. The Public Health Nurse is consulted. She reports that the children do not eat well, having only bannock, fish, berries and the like, and that they eat too much candy and pop between meals. The Social Worker finds out if the oldest girl in the home can look after the smaller ones. She cannot. The children are apprehended and moved 400 miles away to a foster home in Fort St. John - 400 miles by air, 1100 miles by road.

At every step along the way, white man's cultural judgements were used to take a family apart. The teacher did not like the way the children behaved in her industrial institution - the school. The police arrested people for doing something that was not against the law (making home brew). The law itself was not the law of the local people, but the outsider's law, enforced with guns and jails. The Social Worker, called in with an instrument the local people had no access to (the radio-telephone was in the Hudson's Bay store office), looked at the family - the nuclear family, to see if it could function in terms the Social Worker understood - in other words, like his own family. When it couldn't, health evidence was gathered from yet another external influence, the nurse. She thought fish, bannock, berries and candy was an unfit diet. The candy and pop (brought into the store from outside) was in fact the only unhealthy part of the diet. The police and Social Worker jointly used force to place the children on the plane to fly them away to a totally alien environment where all the potential for destroying their cultural identity was unleashed upon them.

(If you want to know the ending, the mother appealed her sentence, was released, demanded the return of her children, and they were flown at great expense back to Telegraph Creek. She succeessfully sued the provincial government for damages, had her house repaired by the RCMP (who had kicked down the door), and got her home brew pot back. And I was the Social Worker, in 1966).

INTERVENTION IN KINSHIP SYSTEMS

In industrial society, Social Workers intervene in the mental processes of individuals, nuclear families, groups of people with some commonalities, communities and/or organizations, administrative processes, numerical and other types of related data, and educational processes. The folks in Telegraph Creek would see most of this as a puzzler. But in industrial society, we know what we are doing, how to do it, why, and so on. (We hope).

When making interventions into the lives of foragers or agriculturists, we intervene instead into kinship systems, extended families, customs, rules, taboos and obligations that are quite different from what we know in the cities. The theoretical paraphernalia that guides us through our jobs in industrial society does not apply very well, if at all, in native villages or small prairie towns.

If Social Workers are to work in rural areas, some knowledge of how kinship systems work is essential, as is a knowledge of the extended family. Kin and extended family relations, however, are not some homogeneous whole that exist unchanged across the face of continents. They vary widely from town to town, village to village, and occasionally from family to family (either nuclear or extended). How do you intervene in a kinship system, where there are helping resources available for many kinds of problems? How do you know who is the support person in an extended family? How can Social Work students learn something about the ways cultures, that have grown from the economic phases of foraging and agriculture, operate?.

Industrial society offers a fairly common front on how it runs. The nuclear family is understood in much the same way from New York to Moose Jaw. Mental health is founded on the same legal and behavioral bases in Toronto and Nanaimo. The foragers kin society doesn't work that way, though. The class of men

who may marry a woman from a certain clan in one river village on the BC coast is not the same as in another village a few miles away. The rules of acceptable behavior in small town Ontario are not the same as in small town New Brunswick. Cataloguing features of life and behavior in kinship and extended family cultures is not possible or useful. The catalogue is endless. Industrial society has homogenized its people fairly well so that workers and jobs can be exchanged. other economic phases and their cultures have not done that, because they did not need to.

What to do, then?

Successful intervenors in kinship and extended family systems have found that where cataloguing fails, analytical ability works. Knowing some theory about why kin relations work, and what that institutional form is for, makes it possible to go to an unfamiliar rural place and have the analytical tools to ask the right questions. Native people travelling from region to region before the white man came showed how it is done. The headmen meet, exchanging gifts, good wishes, and tell each other some of the stories of their band or clan. The legends include inferred or explicit rules of conduct. Various people are introduced who can do things. Outsiders are initiated into the ways of the people by hearing stories, seeing rituals, experiencing welcomes that are purposely designed to guide their way in the unfamiliar society. Social Workers can learn how to do this for themselves. They can learn how to approach the people in a clan who can give them the guides. They can find out who helps, and how. They can find what we call resources, and what they would call, in their own tongues, 'obliged persons"- persons who must help.

MARKET AND NON-MARKET AGRICULTURE

Returning to theory, moving from foraging to agriculture is a theoretical construct. It may have happened strictly according to the theory sometimes, but did not happen exactly that way many other times. Non-market agriculture still exists in some parts of the world - parts of Africa, India, Malaysia,

and South-East Asia. That stage of economy followed more or less out of foraging. Market agriculture is a development of agriculture so that people do not consume all they grow, but sell or barter their produce for other goods - the beginnings of an exchange economy. In North America, the market agricultural sector of our dominant economy is approaching total incorporation into the industrial sector. Farms are run more like factories. Along with this, the extended family that was strong under non-market agriculture, declined as market agriculture grew, and nearly foundered as agribusiness arrived, is now disappearing as managers run farms instead of families. Social Workers need the ability to see what stage of agriculture is the current fact in order to know what to intervene in. Family counselling of a millionaire land-business operator is different from family counselling of a dirt farmer hacking a subsistence living out of a homestead on the edge of the forest, and different again from a group of hippies going back to the land.

THE PLACE OF THEORY

Theory is fine as a catagorizer, as a lenses to view life through. The exceptions to the theory above (and there are many) make us wonder what use such theory is.

Social Work educators have worried about the lack of understanding students and practitioners have about the mechanisms that make our own culture operate. Theoretical understanding of the sociology of the nuclear family does not necessarily make a Social Worker good at family counselling, even when joined with great technical skill at counselling. But the theoretical grounding at least provides a chance at changing the workings of the family merely through knowledge of its working parts, relationships and whatever. Having lived in the culture that uses the nuclear family as its economic unit and basis of its culture gives the Social Worker another boost in his or her power to change family behavior.

A similar working knowledge of the workings of the kinship and extended family systems are required for intervention into economic and cultural phases other than our own. The way to deliver that ability to intervene successfully and humanely is to bring some analytical ability to Social Workers so they can find their own way in the immensely complicated variants of these different cultures.

This paper is not merely a call to "understand another culture" however. The politics of this appeal extend far beyond that. How do Social Workers intervene in the workings of another culture, such as Canada's native culture, without being agents of the industrial society, bent on destroying the ways of the native people? Is that what Social Workers should be used for? If so, is that a conscious policy of governments and agencies, or an accidental result of unconscious cultural imperialism against a defenseless people?

There are one or two unstated assumptions I would like to deal with before ending. One is that industrial society is the culmination, the ultimate development which human society has achieved so far. Many rural people do not accept that judgement. Native people, on the whole, see just the opposite - that industrial society is the depth to which man has descended. We use health and income and housing statistics to support the claim that industrial society brings the most benefits to mankind, and that native foragers and uneconomic farm units can justly be (humanely) incorporated into the dominant economy. I have heard native people and their organizations say that freedom, sound use of the land and resources, being with nature, etc., are higher values, and the outsiders have no right to take that away except the right they give themselves by force.

In all likelihood, neither is correct to claim superiority. Some foragers, some agriculturists and some industrial societies have had beautiful, complex, artistic, friendly and humane cultures. Others in each category

have led sorry, dismal, unhealthy and brutalized existences.

Right now, Social Work, having sprung from the industrial economy and its theoretical trappings, has a potency of its own, supported by the might of the dollar, the police, the courts, and all the intrusive techniques the technological, industrial society can muster. Social Workers find it hard to represent the interests of rural people because most rural people do not come from the same sources, do not share the same cultures, and do not understand or like the theoretical foundations of Social Work as it stands today.

Rural Social Work theory needs to start from another place, a place where foragers, agriculturists and industrialists can be viewed as roughly equal in value, operating differently from each other, requiring quite differing means of intervention by Social Workers and other human service personnel. It needs an analytic vantagepoint, not a catalogue of characteristics. It needs administrative and research time, and perhaps, at this point in history, an anti-colonialist attitude.

If rural Social Work needs to start from another place, can it get there from here?.

FOOTNOTES

1. Leon H. Ginsberg (ed), Social Work in Rural Communities, Council on Social Work Education, New York, 1976.
2. Universities associated with the Southern Regional Education Board, Education and Training SRS (Social and Rehabilitation Services) Manpower in the South. (Concord College, Athens, W. Virginia; Jackson State College, Hazlehurst, Mississippi; Mississippi Vocational College, Itta Bena, Mississippi; University of Tennessee, Martin, Tennessee; West Virginia University, Morgantown, W. Virginia; University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas; Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama; Clinch Valley College, Wise, Virginia)
   Also notable is the University of Wisconsin Center for Social Service which publishes HUMAN SERVICES IN THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT, a monthly forum for humans service practitioners.
3. John Zeglinski (ed) Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work, Social Work Education for Practice in Rural and Northern Regions, Ottawa, 1976.
4. Annual National Institute on Social Work in Rural Areas is being held this Year in Madison, Wisconsin during July.
5. University of Regina Faculty of Social Work presents a class in SOCIAL WORK IN THE RURAL COMMUNITY co-ordinated by myself.
6. For instance, B.J. McGrath, Nursing in Area Health Education Centers, American Journal of Nursing, Vol 76, October, 1976, pp 1605-67. L. Canedo, Rural Health Care in Mexico, Ekistics, Vol 40, Nov., 1975, pp 334-41.
7. Maurice E. Powers, Goals of Public Welfare in a Rural Community, paper presented to British Columbia Department of Social Welfare Conference in Prince George, Sept 27, 1966. Mr. Powers was the Supervisor of Field Services, Department of Public Assistance, Olympia, Washington, USA.
8. See Harold L. Wilensky and Charles N. Lebeaux, Industrial Society and Social Welfare, Free, Press, New York, 1965
   and Karl De Schweinitz, England's Road to Social Security, A.S. Barnes, New York, 1961
9. Marshall Sahlins, Stoneage Economics, Aldine Atherton, Chicago, 1972. One particularly brilliant piece in this book is the chapter called "The Original Affluent Society" in which Sahlins describes how foragers and many non-market agriculturists led much easier lives in terms of time spent making a living than we do in industrial society.
10. Claude Levi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, and "The Story of Asdiwal", in Edmond Leach, The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism, Tavistock Publications, London, 1967
11. Frederick Engels, Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State, Progress Books, Moscow, 1948.
12. Peter Farb, Man's Rise to Civilization As Shown By the Indians of North America from Primeval Times to the Coming of the Industrial State E.P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1968.